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TODD McFARLANE
Weaving new webs for Spider-Man

BATMAN: DIGITAL JUSTICE
Comics' computerized future???

SUPERBOY
New Boy of Steel

Plus:

DICK TRACY & THE SIMPSONS

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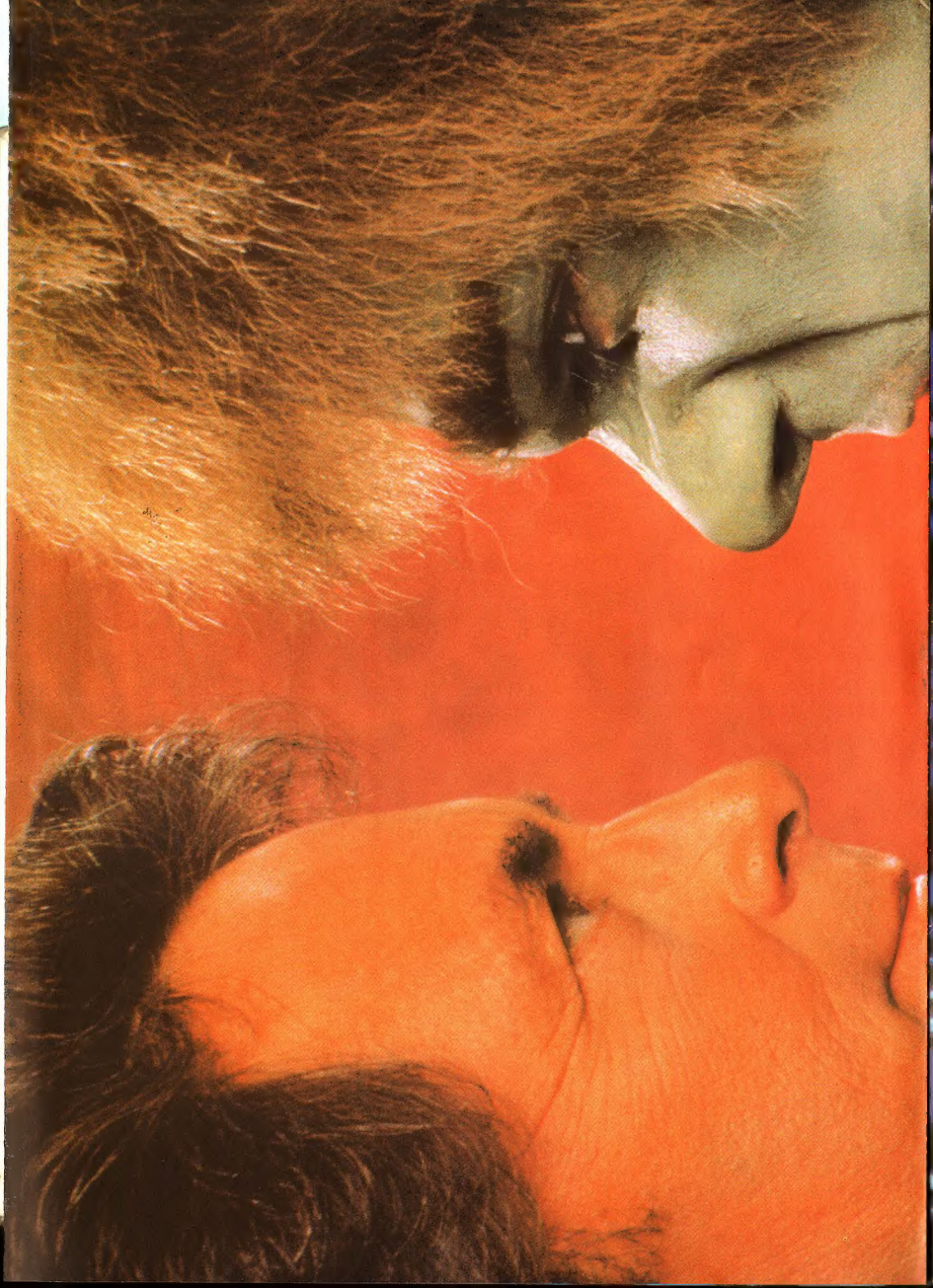

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8 **THE REPORTER**
From Turtle music to mermaid videos!

10 **ALL WEBBED UP**
Todd McFarlane unveils new Spider-Man epics.

47 **DIGITAL DARK KNIGHT**
Batman's computerized, thanks to Pepe Moreno

50 **BOY OF STEEL, TOO**
It's Gerard Christopher as Superboy!

FOLD-OUT SECTION

DICK TRACY
(Warren Beatty)
TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES
THE SIMPSONS
SPIDER-MAN
SUPERBOY
(Gerard Christopher)
THE LITTLE MERMAID
CAPTAIN AMERICA
JETSONS MEET FLINTSTONES

GATE FOLD
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COMICS SCENE

Turtle Jam

A cold, rainy day in Gotham. Inside 42nd Street's Lyric Theater, turtles are dancing. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, that is. Leonardo and Michaelangelo are making their debut concept music video for SBK Records. Yet another conquest for the heroes in a half-shell who have leapt from the b&w pages of independent comics into animated adventure, a successful toy line and a new hit film (see fold-out). Ya Kid K, the lead singer of Hi Tek 3, provides the rap vocals to "Spin That Wheel" from the movie's soundtrack. A song about pizza? No, it has little to do with the film.

"Most songs don't," says Picture Vision video director Jon Small of pre-packaged film albums.

"It was already recorded. They cut some pieces that were not suitable," explains Ya Kid K about its original drug-suggestive lyrics. "I don't know; it's bizarre. I suppose they worry that some parents might take it the wrong way." (The only crime committed in the video is by those nasty film critics, the Foot, who challenge the Turtles at a screening of the movie, where Ya Kid K fills in for April.)

Of the video's heroes, Small admits, "I knew about them, but I wasn't interested in them. But I was intrigued when I found out that Jim Henson's Creature Shop made the Turtles." This, however, became his greatest headache. The Turtles (due to their claustrophobic shells under the hot lights and their animatronic nature) were temperamental. "They can only work 15 to 20 minutes out of an hour," the director complains. "When you do music videos, you usually need 18 hours to do one video. There was a fight scene in the movie, and I asked how long it took to shoot. They told me *seven days*. I've got *two hours*! It's almost impossible."

Meanwhile, the folks from Henson, who on the film had a relatively short development period to design the Turtles and create a revolutionary new radio control system that would free the Ninjas from complicated cables and multiple operators, found making the videos to be a bit of a vacation. "This was a lot more fun," notes Creature Shop Supervisor William Plant. "The pressure was quite intense but not as bad as the film, because we weren't actually telling a story."

The next day would find them all under the Manhattan Bridge to finish Partners in Kryme's "Turtle Power," video—a song actually written for the film. The location lensing would cement director Jon Small's notion that the adolescent amphibians have become jaded by fame. "I had to wait on the Turtles, and wait, wait, wait. So, it was very difficult. In fact, these videos have been two of the hardest shoots I've ever done. It's hard enough to work with kids and pets; now I have to add Turtles to my roster."

—Eddie Berganza

Photo: David Hutchison

Turtles Characters: Copyright 1990 Mirage Studios

Those multi-media shellbacks take time out from their music video shoot to pose with fans.

Little Mermaid Art: Copyright 1989 The Walt Disney Company

Fins Up

The Little Mermaid is Disney's highest-grossing (in first release) animated film ever; just months after its theatrical run, it's appearing at home video stores on cassette (from Disney Home Video, $26.99). *Little Mermaid* (see fold-out) makes extensive use of special FX animation and hand inking; all are soon to be lost arts as Disney switches to computer coloring for its future feature releases, which means *no* more cels. Additionally, Academy Award-winning songwriters Howard Ashman and Alan Menken "brought a theatrical aproach and style to the project that we tried to wed with animation and film techniques," says John Musker, *Little Mermaid*'s producer/director. "The marriage is a good one. The songs are better integrated here than in any Disney film in a long time."

—David Hutchison

Star Spangles

As Captain America, the immortal hero created by Joe Simon & Jack Kirby, celebrates his 50th anniversary, he'll star not only in a movie (see COMICS SCENE #12), but in numerous special projects (like a two-volume hardcover set collecting the classic Simon & Kirby yarns).

Captain America scribe Mark Gruenwald has also taken a new angle on this year's upcoming adventures in the regular comics title. "I would like to take a small core group of heroes and villains and explore them in depth. They are Captain America, Diamondback, the Red Skull and a new villain named Crossbones," Gruenwald says. "There will be other people who enter the picture, but these are the ones who will be at the core of the conflicts for at least the next year."

Will the movie (now due out in August, see fold-out for its comic adaptation cover) affect sales on the regular monthly title? Shaking his head, Gruenwald dismisses any benefits.

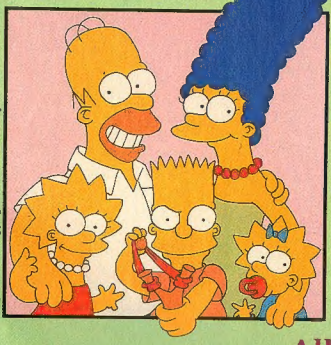
"I don't think it will affect the sales at all," he says. "To the best of my knowledge, the *Superman* movies didn't affect the books on a longterm sales basis. With any luck, people will just remember there's a hero named Captain America."

—*Scott Lobdell*

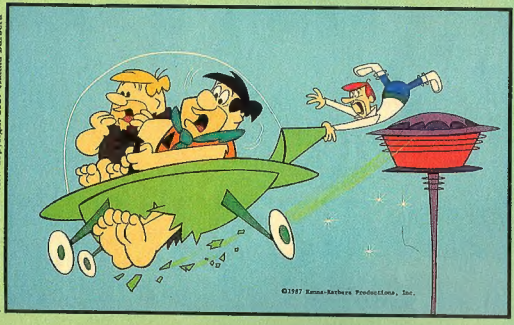
The Parkers on Holiday

Is Spider-Man overworked? Yes! Appearing in five books (see page 10), it seemed like a perfect time to get away from it all—and Mary Jane's inheritance in the Scottish highlands looked like a great opportunity for a second honeymoon. But nothing is easy for the Parkers. Soon, they are in the midst of ghouls, goblins (not the green kind), a sorceress and of course the UK branch of the Hellfire Club. It's all courtesy of Charles Vess, who spent months in Scotland to make sure Peter Parker would have an eerie time in the graphic novel *Spirits of the Earth* (see fold-out).

Spider-Man Art: Charles Vess/Copyright 1990 Marvel Entertainment Group



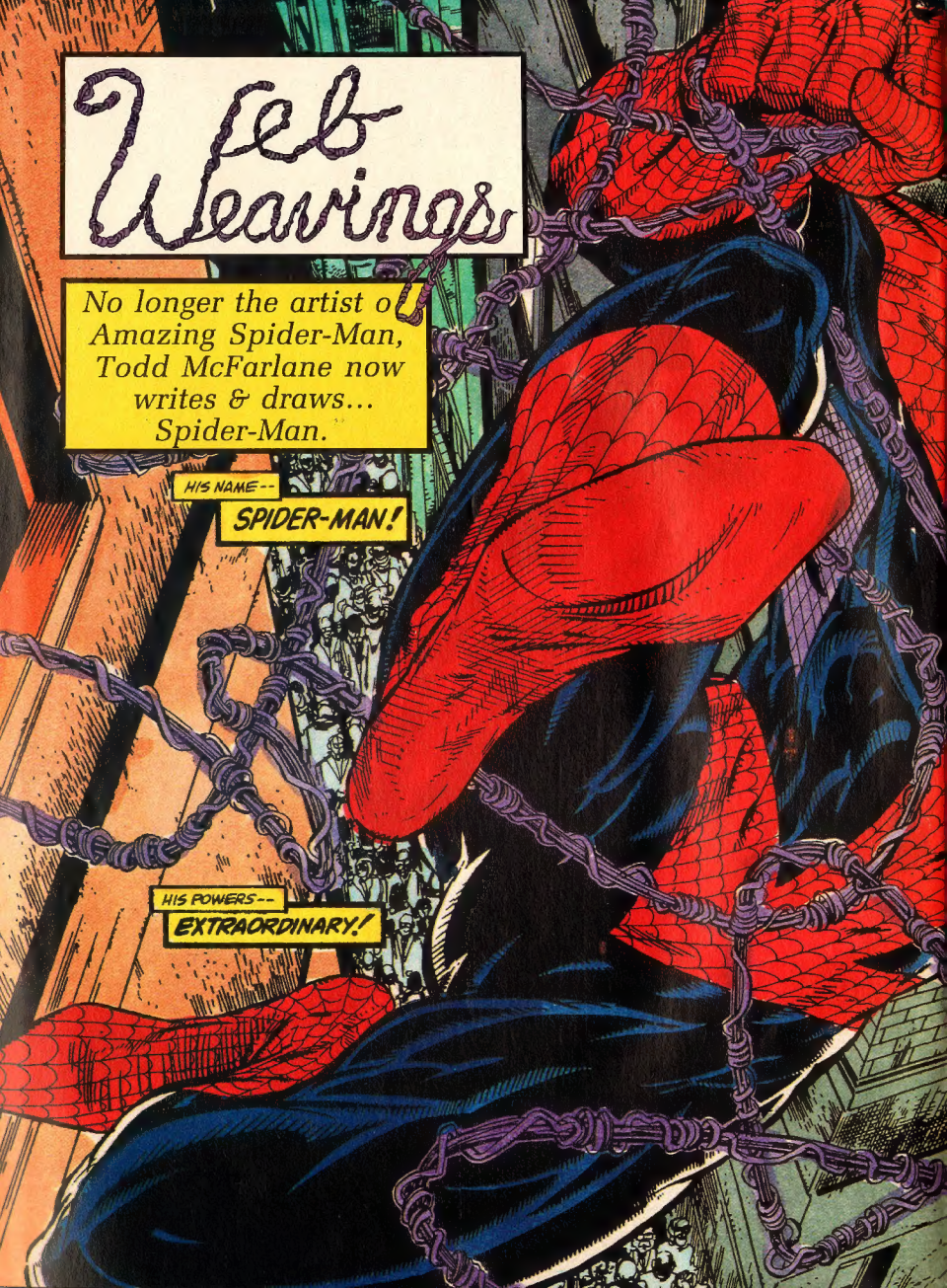
Simpsons Art: Copyright 1990 20th Century Fox



Jetsons Meet Flintstones Art: Copyright 1987 Hanna-Barbera

All in the Family

The mega-hit Fox Network cartoon show *The Simpsons* (see fold-out) is following a grand family tradition that began 30 years ago in the town of Bedrock. *The Flintstones* was the first prime-time animated series to win America's heart. What began as a prehistoric pastiche of *The Honeymooners* evolved into a parody of modern living through cave dwelling conveniences. So successful was Hanna-Barbera's formula that in two years it begat a distant future cousin, *The Jetsons*. After many incarnations (one of which had *The Jetsons Meet the Flintstones*, see fold-out), these two clans remain strong today. Fred and company await their chance to become live-action movie stars in a film long in development (now at Amblin with *Roseanne*'s John Goodman a possibility to fill Fred's leopard-skin suit), while the Jetsons go animated to the big screen this summer via Universal. And if merchandising is a sign of success for these families, then the Simpsons (who have already been renewed for another 23 episodes) are going to do just fine.


Web Wearings
No longer the artist of Amazing Spider-Man, Todd McFarlane now writes & draws... Spider-Man.
HIS NAME--
SPIDER-MAN!
HIS POWERS--
EXTRAORDINARY!

BY DANIEL DICKHOLTZ

Like flies caught in an arachnid's snare, comics fans, it seems, have themselves been entangled in a trap spun by their own hero, the astounding Spider-Man. There, out on its farthest reaches, are the wall-crawler's appearances at parades and special events. Further in lie the videocassettes of his past work on the small screen as well as word of his forthcoming film and TV projects. On nearby radiants can be found all the assorted action figures, model kits, trade paperbacks and Marvel Masterworks editions. And nestled in the center sit the pack of regular monthly titles that make it all possible: *Amazing*, *Spectacular*, *Web* and the reprint book *Marvel Tales*. That should be more than enough for anyone, but as Todd McFarlane, now busy on the latest series to feature the web-slinger, is learning, it's not.

"If it was my choice, I *wouldn't* have created another Spider-Man book," he admits. "You've got four, so you're going to hit them with a *fifth* one? But the decision to do a Spider-Man book wasn't mine. I just wanted to go into a new book and do some writing as well as the artwork, and they wanted me to continue doing Spider-Man, so the best way to keep everybody happy was to create another Spider-Man title. And I'm not going to turn that down, being the character that he is. I mean, I would have had to go to a lesser character or create a new one that nobody really knew about, but this way, I can have my cake and eat it too.

"Since I'm doing it, my biggest thing is to make this book *different* from the others, just to justify having it out there." Thus, the simply titled *Spider-Man* will be printed on higher quality paper (with a $1.50 price to match) which allows McFarlane to "make the visuals a little more artsy-fartsy than they've been." But more importantly, this new series will *avoid* the tight continuity that binds *Web*, *Amazing* and *Spectacular* together, a suggestion made by editor Jim Salicrup that relieved the fledgling writer.

"They were doing it basically to save me from floundering and to minimize my mistakes," McFarlane notes. However, it also allows him "to do bigger storylines. So, we're going to play it like a mini-series within a series, although I can't very well do anything major-major. I can't chop Peter Parker's arm off because then we would have to chop it off in the other books. I *can* chop it off *within* my story; I just somehow have to reattach it by the time the story's over."

Still, it does afford him a tremendous amount of freedom, something which he intends to take every advantage of. "I can literally do whatever I want," he stresses. "Theoretically, I can *never* get tired of this book. If I get tired of Spider-Man, I might say, 'Well, I wish I could draw Thor,' and all I have to do is go up to Jim and say, 'For the next three issues, let's bring in Thor.' get approval from the *Thor* [editorial] office and I get to draw Thor. And then by that time, I'll say, 'Aw, Spidey's not so bad.' So, I really have access to the whole Marvel Universe through this book."

The liberty that he now so relishes was, in fact, the very thing that finally drove McFarlane to abandon his illustration-only duties on *Amazing Spider-Man*, the title that brought him his fame.

Explains McFarlane, "It's not because I think I'm a writer and it's not because I have anything deep or meaningful to say. It's because I'm an artist, and the only frustration that I had being an artist was that I didn't get to draw *what* I wanted *when* I wanted. Basically, this [*Spider-Man*] is just a Todd soother, if you want to call it that. If I want to draw Thor, I can draw Thor. If I want to draw candlesticks, I make them fight in a candlestick factory. If I wanted not to have any backgrounds, I would make sure that somehow Spidey gets dropped out of a plane into the desert. And if I want to draw buildings, then I'll make sure he's right down in Times Square. So, it's just Todd doing what he wants artistically, and *somehow* I'm going to have to work stories around what I want to draw."

The real villain of the first five-part saga will remain in the shadows until she's ready to strike.

Not everything the writer/artist had designs on could find its way into his premiere storyline, however. But while his first multi-part tale will still feature his own particular version of one of the webbed wonder's oldest nemeses, and introduce a secretive new foe as well, it won't be quite the debut McFarlane had planned for his series.

All Spider-Man Art: Todd McFarlane

"I *wanted* to start off with a Spider-Man/Green Goblin confrontation," he remarks. "I figured the two classic guys in the first five issues, I mean, what better way to start off a story? But they've already got plans for the Green Goblin. With some of the others, I would go, 'Well, how about this guy?' 'No, he's tied up.' By the time we ran through the list, I was limited as to who I could use, so I made it a hybrid, bringing in an old guy, crossing it over with a new bad guy, to see if I can pull off a semi-interesting story."

Ultimately, the loathsome Lizard became the comics creator's choice for revival. Yet as fearsome as the menace has long been depicted, as McFarlane has reshaped Dr. Curt Connors' reptilian guise, *every* aspect of the human chemist will now be completely unreachable.

"Visually, the Lizard can be awesome to look at," the writer/artist states. "I've only had a chance to draw him once before, but he'll be even more of a monster this time. His teeth have gotten bigger, he's gotten more sadistic-looking, there are many more shadows, and you'll *never* see Curt Connors in these five issues. You'll never see his wife or his kid, and you'll never have the Lizard being able to speak one word just because I hate it when [writers have] these guys talk with S's all over the place, like they have a lisp. That always drove me buggy.

"In this book, I'm playing the Lizard as a cross between Jason from *Friday the 13th*, where you think that he's done for and he's really not, and *ALIENS*. If you saw *ALIENS*, either part, those guys didn't talk and they didn't need to; you knew you were in trouble, because it was all there visually. If I pull the Lizard off the way that I should, when he looks at you and things are dripping from his mouth and he has his hand up and he's leaping at you, he doesn't really need to say, 'I'm going to attack you.'"

When it comes to the arachnoid adventurer's latest rival, though, McFarlane has far fewer comments to make. He does note that former *Spider-Man* assistant editor Glenn Herdling brought her to his attention, adds that she "is someone who has been in only five panels in the entire course of her career," and will even admit that she is "in the background pulling the strings of this whole ordeal," but more than that the writer/artist would "rather not say, because it's like a mystery through the first three or four issues. I always hate it when guys give away the whole plotline before I start reading the stories, so we'll just have to let the readers grow into her."

The web-slinger may face foes from his comics past, but McFarlane won't have to contend with the continuity of the other Spidey titles.

All Spider-Man Art & Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1999 Marvel Entertainment Group

But even as this foe prepares to confront him, the amazing wall-crawler will discover that no new friends will be coming forward to support him. "He has enough of a cast around him," McFarlane remarks. Consequently, "instead of growing outwards, I'll be collapsing inwards," using the *Spider-Man* format's longer storylines to explore in greater detail each of the web-slinger's associates as they appear in appropriate plots.

"The only one I'm really going to concentrate on is his wife, Mary Jane, just because he spends half his life with her," says McFarlane. "I'm married and young and happy and in love, and my wife is an important part of my day-to-day events, both while I'm doing the job and when I'm away from it. I can't really believe Peter Parker would be any different, and that his wife wouldn't be any less concerned than my wife is concerned with what I do on a daily basis. So, I'm going to see if I can't add a little to the young couple for those people who didn't think that Mary Jane and Peter should have gotten married, maybe throw some nice stuff in there that makes it a little more interesting and plausible."

After the more than two years he has spent with Peter Parker, following him to his graduate school classes as well as to work and standing by him during battles with fiends as diverse as Venom, the Chameleon and J. Jonah Jameson, McFarlane has "some thought process into what makes this character go. I see Spider-Man feeling an obligation towards his superhero career, trying to balance that with a real career and still keep his wife in the picture. Many people have trouble balancing. I know when I've got deadlines and I've got to work day and night in a career that I love, I still feel guilty because I should be spending more time with my wife.

"Again, I'm not really going to do anything deep with Spidey. I'm just going to throw him in situations and have him react the way that I think he would react and moreover, the way that I think the average person would react. I've got a scene early in the book where he takes out a psycho in six seconds and then he sits around and wonders why these people even try to shoot bullets at him when he has fought guys like Galactus. And if Galactus can't squoosh him and kill him, then why should a guy with a little Saturday night special be able to touch him? Spidey just doesn't understand why these guys even attempt to do that, and it's no different than I'm sure when you go home, you question why people do things. So, he can get a little high on his horse every now and then, and Mary Jane'll have to bring him down to a certain level and he'll be Spidey again and he'll get cocky again. He'll have his ups and downs."

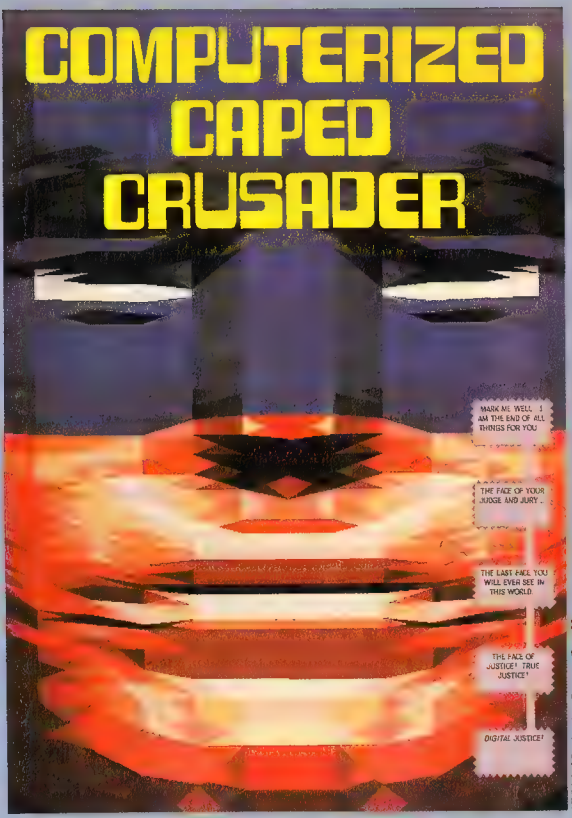
At about the time *Amazing* #300 was due to be shipped to newsstands and specialty shops, McFarlane, then still fresh to the series, remarked that he wanted to bring to his own work both the peculiarities he found in Steve Ditko's Spider-Man and the handsomeness he saw in the features of John Romita's characters. And even now, after his career has been established and his style has evolved, their influence can still be felt.

"I've been on it long enough now that I don't consciously think about it like I used to," he reports. "As weird as it is, I haven't really looked at that much Ditko stuff. But I would close my eyes and remember what I *think* Ditko was about and then try to use some of those quirky things. If I look at it now with a professional eye, then it takes some of the magic away from it, so I like to just pull out of my head the stuff that I was really enthralled with and ape certain images. And the same is true for the John Romita Peter Parker and Mary Jane. He did the civilian part of that to a tee. So, if I can pull just a little bit of those and mix them up with my style and pop it into the '90s, then really, that's about the best I can hope for right now."

Almost abashed, he confides with a chuckle, "I don't have anything esoteric to say like some of the other [writers and artists]. I was out on one panel [at a Great Eastern comics convention in NYC], and I felt out of place. I just want to do my comic books, you know? I like comics, I just want to do them and that's about it. Nothing really deep to it. You know you're going to get Todd McFarlane. Todd McFarlane jerking off is what [*Spider-Man* is] going to be, nothing more, nothing less, and we'll see if people come along for the ride."

MATT GROENING

COMPUTERIZED CAPED CRUSADER


MARK ME WELL. I AM THE END OF ALL THINGS FOR YOU
THE FACE OF YOUR JUDGE AND JURY...
THE LAST FACE YOU WILL EVER SEE IN THIS WORLD!
THE FACE OF JUSTICE! TRUE JUSTICE!
DIGITAL JUSTICE!

All Digital Justice Art: Courtesy Pepe Moreno

Pepe Moreno plugs into a computer to output a Batman for a new generation.

By MICHAEL McAVENNIE

After 51 years of faithfully protecting the upstanding citizens of Gotham City, Batman stands ready to face a new generation, and not necessarily one made up of fans. Rather, this particular Bat-generation originates from two Apple Macintosh II computers belonging to award-winning craftsman and graphics art storyteller Pepe Moreno.

And just what exactly can this digital Dark Knight do? What else, but mete out *Digital Justice*, which is also the name of Moreno's computer-generated graphic novel from DC Comics. Featuring a palette of more than 16 million colors, the novel is a combination of the latest advances in 3-D imaging, high definition laser printing, lifelike high resolution graphics and state-of-the-art software.

"I wanted to do *Digital Justice* on the Mac, because I knew what kind of look the computer could give the book," says Moreno. "The computer allows you to do 'special FX,' so it's more like making a movie than drawing a book. It was a very good way of portraying a world of the future. "

If it's a "world of the future" the storyteller wanted to achieve, then why in that world did he feature a character who is to a science fiction environment as a fish is to dry land? "When I entered negotiations to employ this technology with DC," Moreno says, "we needed to choose a major character market-wise in order to go through with the project. The Batman's 50th anniversary was coming up at the time, so he was the obvious choice. This was decided before I even *heard* about the movie.

"I also went with Batman because of my own personal tastes and likes of human abilities over super-powered ones," he adds. "Batman has a history of using technology in his fight against crime, and what the hell would a *super*hero need all this technology for when he has super powers? It would have been a bad excuse to have such a character use any equipment as an 'aid.' "

Digital Justice takes place in Gotham Megatropolis around the 21st Century, where a computer virus known as "the Joker" has become the world's first "digital dictator." No computer, or human, can stop this Macintosh-made monster. That is, until a descendant of one-time police commissioner James Gordon, while investigating a series of executions, finds a "clean" program written by the mythical alter-ego of late millionaire philanthropist Bruce Wayne.

"Gordon is a very frustrated cop in a very corrupt police system," Moreno explains. "And, because he's a noble guy with a strong sense of propriety and justice, he just gets himself more frustrated with the system." The young cop's frustration reaches a boiling point, however, when his investigation results in his partner's death and forces him to go into hiding. Taking up the mantle of the Batman and aided by a new Robin [one of Asian descent], Gordon begins a new war on crime, which eventually climaxes in a digital battle between the computerized Clown Prince of Crime and the Dark Byte, errr, Knight.

But before Gordon can even think of taking on the Joker, he has to go through a new Catwoman and several nasty cyborgs: the Lawman, the Media Man, the Mob Lord and Madam X, the mayor of Gotham. "They control the city through legal, media, criminal and political means," Moreno says, "and the Joker controls them. He is not physical; he is a code, which makes him extremely powerful, since everything in that society is 'wired up.' "

While others have come out with such innovative works [First's *Shatter*

All Art: Pepe Moreno

SOMETHING TELLS ME SHE ISN'T PLAYING--
C'MON, GATA, WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR...
DON'T CALL ME GATA! I'M CATWOMAN--AND THE CAT IS THE NATURAL ENEMY OF THE BAT
[IT'S TIME YOU LEARNED THAT!
WE'RE WITH YOU, CATWOMAN-- JUST LIKE ALWAYS.
LET'S GET STARTED!
COME ON, GATA. THERE'RE NO CAMERAS HERE NOW.
OF COURSE THERE ARE NO CAMERAS! YOU'VE STOLEN ALL THE CAMERAS! BUT I'M GOING TO GET THEM BACK!
EVEN IF I HAVE TO KILL YOU TO DO IT!

Moreno wrote and illustrated *Digital Justice*. Doug Murray dialogued it.

and Marvel's *Iron Man: Crash*), Moreno is also taking his project *beyond* the printed page; he is currently working on a CD-ROM version of *Digital Justice*. This "electronic comic book," as the writer/artist describes it, will feature limited animation and provide additional information on characters and props through what he calls "hyperinformation." Music, actors' voices in place of written speech balloons and sound effects will also be used in the CD-ROM version.

"The relevancy of this approach," Moreno explains, "is that the original art is in digital form. Therefore, it can also be output to different media, turning itself into a multi-media medium. We're able to use the very same data used to create the book and assemble it on a [Silicon Beach] SuperCard or a [Macintosh] HyperCard-like environment, so one will be able to *play* the comic book. The fact that it's audio-visual, and the kind of images you'll see, almost make it an animated feature."

Moreno also sees other possible technological breakthroughs ahead with the three-dimensional computer graphics he devised to identify the story's characters and props. "With the raw elements I created through this method and input into the computer," he says, "this very same information could go from you, who are assembling the pages of a storyboard, to someone doing an animated feature. So, if you take the 3-D data for the Batmobile, for example, you can use that data to perform many multimedia functions, even transfer it directly to video or film. And, with the basic design work applied to CAD/CAE (computer-aided design/computer-aided engineering), you could connect to a mill and turn that very same car into a toy that's identical to the original design."

Before the electronic comic book could begin development, Moreno first had to get *Digital Justice* to the printed page. He started the process by creating all backgrounds, buildings and machinery (including an ultra hi-tech Batmobile) three-dimensionally on the Mac with Silicon Beach's Super 3-D and Enabling Technologies' Zing programs.

"I wanted to create everything but the human element in 3-D, although doing that would have limited the story to four city blocks," according to the computer craftsman. "That kind of scenario, however, could be translated into a fully animated feature, since all the elements and camera angles would have already been there."

Moreno scanned rough hand sketches of the book's characters on a MicroTek black-and-white scanner and enhanced them with a program called ImageStudio. He then added shadowing to his sketches to make the characters stand out against flat landscapes. "I chose to do it that way because I felt the humans had to look like humans," he explains. "I wanted a contrast between them and the background, which is all cybernetic.

"Another program I used that was extremely relevant," he adds, "was Studio/8, which is a combining program that put all of the elements in place. Quark Xpress was the page-layout program that did everything, and then I used software from Anaya Systems, a group in Spain who developed a color-separation module that allows you to print the pages on the screen into film for the printer. Software like Freehand and Adobe Systems' Illustrator provided logos."

A CONFRONTATION THAT WILL DETERMINE THE FATE OF THIS CITY--AND ULTIMATELY, THAT OF THE ENTIRE WORLD
A CONFRONTATION THAT IS, INCIDENTALLY, BEING BROADCAST LIVE TO ALL THE PEOPLES OF THAT WORLD...

Working with a pixel palette, Moreno was able to add variety to the Joker virus' world.

With the book already a pre-order success, Moreno now has the go-ahead to complete the interactive part of his grand design. He is currently using Macintosh's HyperCard, Silicon Beach's SuperCard and MacroMind's VideoWorks as the main programs for his electronic comic. Adobe Systems' PhotoShop, which creates and processes in-between images and changes colorization, and Studio/8 are also being used "to build whatever needs to be built in order to create an animation out of a frame. I'll go back to Super 3-D and Pro 3-D as well. There will be other programs that I'll consider enhancing 3-D elements with as the project progresses."

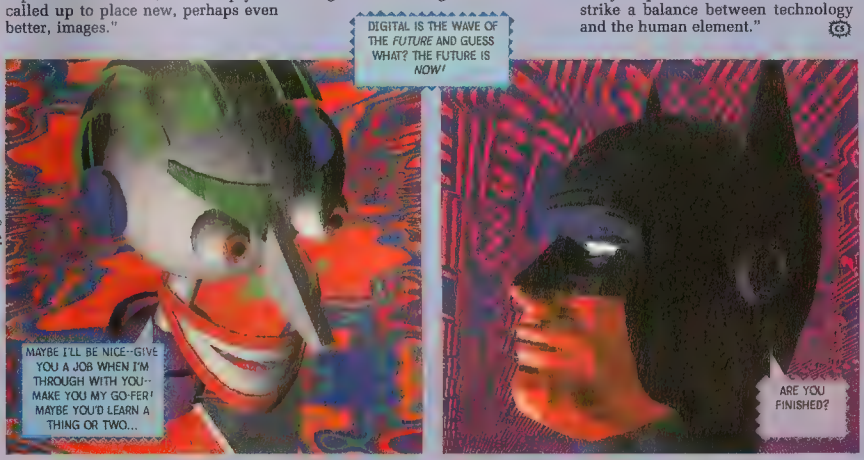
The computer arsenal Moreno is using to transform his book into a CD-ROM version would impress even Batman. In addition to the two Mac II computers and various software, Moreno's equipment complement includes a Sharp 450 color scanner, a 45-megabyte removable disk drive from Mass Microsystems and various Radius products, including: a Trinitron monitor; an 8-, 16- and 24-bit color card; an accelerator board; and an escape calibration tool, which calibrates his monitor to the one used at Anaya Systems.

In addition to his electronic comic book, Moreno has signed with Electronic Arts to design a video game version for *Rebel*, a character of his own creation. As for the possibility of a sequel to *Digital Justice*, he says, "If I were asked, I would certainly do one. The computer allows for more playability with images, and the material from the book, which is already input into the Mac, can simply be called up to place new, perhaps even better, images."

WE FIGURE THE TWO VICTIMS STOOD HERE, THE PERP WAS BACK THERE WITH AN OLD AUTOMATIC.
WHAT ABOUT THE SERVO'S RECORDS
ANY HARD DATA AT ALL?

Gotham and its servocop guardians are an example of Pepe Moreno's wish to create everything but the human element (which he more subtly shades) in 3-D.

Moreno hopes that *Digital Justice* will not only look unique, but that it will also convey a message to those who read it. "During my conversations with [Batman editor] Denny O'Neil, he pointed out that even though I was taking the side of the human element," Pepe Moreno explains, "I was doing the book on a computer. I hope people realize that even though what you see in the book isn't necessarily *my* vision of the future, it's also not something that's entirely impossible. We must learn to strike a balance between technology and the human element."


DIGITAL IS THE WAVE OF THE *FUTURE* AND GUESS WHAT? THE FUTURE IS *NOW!*
MAYBE I'LL BE NICE--GIVE YOU A JOB WHEN I'M THROUGH WITH YOU-- MAKE YOU MY GO-FER! MAYBE YOU'D LEARN A THING OR TWO...
ARE YOU FINISHED?

Batman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1990 DC Comics Inc.

***Digital Justice* will not be limited to the printed page; its very nature makes it accessible to other media (see fold-out).**

SUPERBOY™

Gerard Christopher lives and breathes his role as the Boy of Steel.

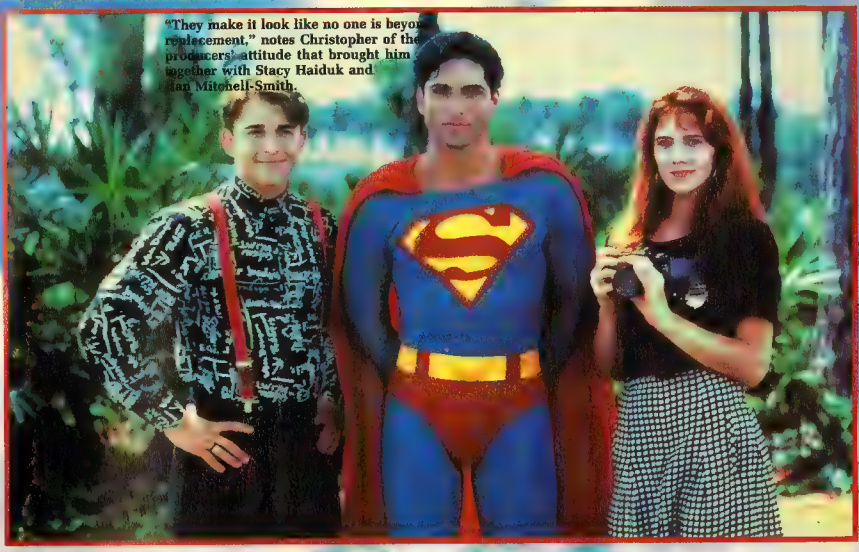
It's early Friday morning, Orlando, Florida. Outside, the bright winter sun has already pushed the temperature well into the 70s, but inside Stage 24 at Universal Studios, the scene couldn't possibly be more of a contrast. Fog machines billow smoke around the outside of a dilapidated old house brimming with cobwebs and dustballs and "things."

An intensely bright, almost unholy light cuts through the darkness and shines upon our hero, poised in the doorway between two fast closing doors as he yells to his friends to escape. Andy McAlister leaps through the opening, only to be confronted by the ghost of Billy the Kid. As Andy stumbles to his feet, a booming voice yells, "Cut! Print!" and all is restored to normal.

"Normal" in this case is a break in the final day of shooting on the season's 25th, and next-to-last, episode of *Superboy*. Gerard Christopher, the handsome 30-year-old actor who portrays this second-season Boy of Steel, takes advantage of this break to talk about "being Superboy."

"Working over the last 26 weeks has been really difficult," Christopher says. "Working in this costume when you first start out is incredibly uncomfortable. It's hot when it's hot;

By BILL WILSON



"They make it look like no one is beyond replacement," notes Christopher of the producers' attitude that brought him together with Stacy Haiduk and Dan Mitchell-Smith.

All Superboy Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1989 DC Comics Inc.

it's cold when it's cold. You're never really physically comfortable. You have to get used to the set, and to what you're doing, and you have to *create* the character. I purposely didn't watch any of the shows from last year because I wanted to do something different, so I just had to find what was going to be 'me' and do that. It took a while."

Christopher's previous credits include *Murphy's Law* and *True Confessions*, and the films *Dangerously Close* and *Tomboy*, but he acknowledges that nothing had prepared him for *Superboy*'s schedule. "I average 12, 14-hour days, but there have been times when we've gone 19 hours to finish a show. Things like that are very stressful. The stress borders on, well, I don't want to use the word 'dangerous,' but I would say tough, really tough. When people are that tired and that stressed out, they're really on the edge. People can make mistakes, drop things, forget things."

It certainly doesn't leave much time for a social life. "I have a girl friend who's here, but sometimes I forget her name, I see her so little," he sighs.

Still, Christopher looks back on this season with pride. "In retrospect, it's nice to see that the show has made such a big transition, such an improvement even over the season's first couple of weeks.

This year was just so rush-rush from the very beginning. When I got here, I was literally off the plane and straight here. I was in Europe, and for some reason, I couldn't get on my plane to come back here. I called the studio and they said, 'You've *gotta* get on another plane *immediately*!' I mean, they couldn't even wait another *half-day* for me to get in. They ended up spending a lot of money getting me in here on time, believe me. It was immediately rush-rush to get into costume fittings; I had to be a very quick study. I didn't have a whole lot of time to breathe and think, 'What am I doing, and how am I going to do it?' All that just had to happen over the course of the year. I feel very fortunate that now that we've finished, we'll have 26 shows we all can be very proud of."

Superboy currently ranks in the top 10 first-run syndicated shows, bettering its maiden season success. "The show has done well enough to where we're going to be picked up, and it looks like we're going to go on for at least another two years," Christopher says. "I feel really good about that. Everybody does, and I really am looking forward to next year. I think there'll be many changes. We're going to go into it in a more relaxed condition. We can just concentrate and really involve ourselves in the stories, how we're going to make it all come together, and how to make it even *better*.

"I look forward to taking a more active role in all that. I hope to write one or two scripts next season, and I hope to even perhaps direct an episode or two, which would be fun. I just think I have a different insight than anyone else."

While it's quite obvious that playing the character would provide him with some insight on what makes the Boy of Steel tick, just how well does Christopher *know* the character? "I heavily researched him. I saw all of the Kirk Alyn Superman serials, the George Reeves TV episodes, and, of course, the Chris Reeve movies. I grew up reading the comics. I'm *constantly* seeking out articles, magazines and features about the character, these episodes, and any little tid-bit that might help. I'm learning more and more all the time."

Having watched each previous interpretation of the Kryptonian hero

closely, Christopher notes just what made each version work, "George Reeves did some wonderful things with the character, bringing a kind of inner strength and compassion to Superman. And Chris Reeve added that human quality, that emotional side. I had the most difficulty identifying with the Kirk Alyn version, but his, for its time, was an accurate portrayal, too."

And what of any added pressure in being called upon to portray the *Boy* of Steel, with almost no history to precede him? "Well, of course, there was that *Superboy* pilot with John Rockwell years ago. Coincidentally, I happen to know John Rockwell. He's a friend of mine, and I never knew he had done that pilot until I got this part! Anyway, it's a tremendous responsibility to portray this character, knowing what a legend he is. He's a role model for kids; these days, it seems kids don't have enough role models, except maybe some athletes, but nothing like we had when we were kids. That's a *lot* of responsibility to shoulder. I have to be very careful to protect that image."

As to just which Super*man*'s his Super*boy* might grow into, Christopher shrugs and says, "That's a really tough question, because each actor has made the character his own in some way. I guess I would just like to think that my Superboy would emulate the best qualities of all of them."

Even down to the smallest details, Christopher cannot avoid the comparisons between the current image of the character and those of the past. "I get a kick out of seeing, for example, how loose or wrinkled the costume looks. I think, 'God, they weren't *nearly* as demanding then as they are now.' There's such a stress on the character looking almost perfect and superhero-like. I have to watch that I don't cross my arms across my chest, which I personally think could be a gesture of strength, but it's a concern for covering the emblem and also because merely crossing your arms while wearing any type of material causes little wrinkles. You just have to be very careful at all times."

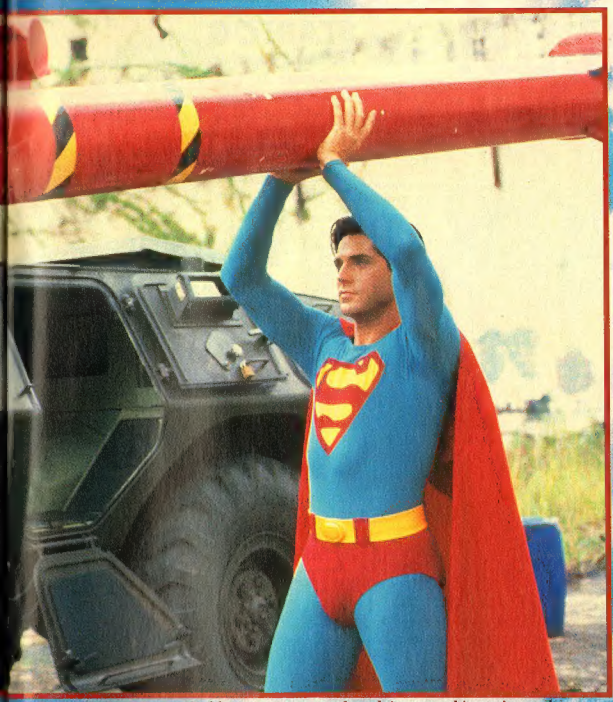
But Christopher quickly dismisses the notion that there are any similar pressures when he's portraying Clark Kent. "There's much more latitude there. Although I like doing both characters, I have much more freedom with Clark. It's a great break, because I can really be creative and do things that are stupid and silly."

The stunt work is an integral part of the show. "Is it still a rush to fly? Oh yeah, it's gotten more comfortable, too. Just like anything else, the more you do it, the more you learn about how to do it. It's a really enjoyable experience, and it's so much a part of the show, to do the flying stunts to make them look more real."

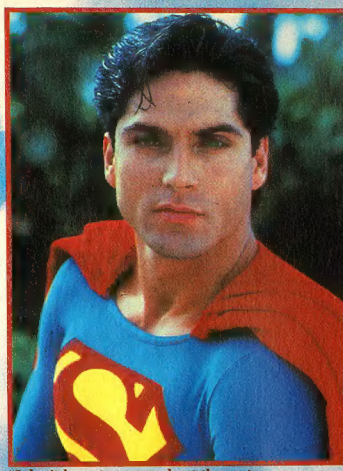
Every episode, Superboy faces new challenges and strong villains like Sherman Howard as Lex Luthor. "We have these new guest stars coming in every week throwing us a new curveball. The only thing that has to stay the same is that our characters have to maintain a certain credibility every week, no matter what's thrown at us. We just deal with it as it comes, as our characters would handle it. Superboy handles things by always looking at what's right and what's true, and he does his best to do the right thing. He's responsible, he's nice, and he doesn't believe in killing, so you stick with that philosophy in dealing with any situation as that character."

With the appearance over the season of such actors as Michael Callan (as Metallo, the "most fun" bad guy), Britt Ekland, Philip Michael Thomas, George Lazenby and comedian Gilbert Gottfried, the stage seems to be set for the kind of "actors in pursuit of guest-shots" casting that enlivened TV's *Batman*. "*Superboy* does have that kind of appeal to actors to *want* to be on the show. We've got people calling us all the time, in fact, which is great, but I don't think it could ever become

This season, Gerard Christopher was Superboy. His film parents have also changed, becoming TV's Jor-El and Lara (George Lazenby and Britt Ekland).



"If you have a stunt double, it means you end up doing everything twice, and you just can't always afford to take that extra time," admits Christopher.



"I don't have to worry about the costume or about how I look," Christopher says of his Clark Kent alter-ego. "In fact, the doofier I look, the better!" (see fold-out).

as campy as *Batman*. The show's too different; I just don't think it would work that way. *Superboy*'s about a slice of Americana, a piece of American culture. The show's doing well, and it's a good show, and *that's* what makes people want to do it."

Christopher plans to relax in LA during the series' hiatus. "When and if they take me back, and I anticipate they will, I'll be on my way back to Florida."

But wait—the very same man who talks of writing and directing come next season, casually says, "When and if they take me back..."? Should anything be read into that? "No," Christopher replies. "Everything's fine. They seem very happy with me and with my performance. I've really worked hard to win their respect and appreciation, and everything seems fine, but there's an old saying about 'until the deal's done, it isn't done.' I've been told personally that everything is fine, but until I'm on the plane heading for Orlando in late July, I don't consider it a sure thing.

"Until I have a contract that's signed for next year, things like that just can't be counted on. I anticipate the best; I really hope that I'll be back, I'm sure I'll be back, but they have a history [the producers dismissed original Superboy John Haymes-Newton and two other regulars at the first season's end], and a precedent was set last year. They make it look like no one is beyond replacement." His long-term contract contains an option clause for each year. "More specifically, it's a question of whether or not they pick up my option for next year, and that's something that I hope and I trust *will* happen."

Before this season began (in COMICS SCENE #10), Christopher spoke excitedly about the challenge of playing Superboy, the honor he felt that had been bestowed upon him. Now, with almost a full season under his belt, long days of filming, weekends of script study, and hours of intense workouts, one can only wonder if he still feels the same. "Absolutely. I consider myself in such good company that to be doing something like this is like a dream come true. I would never have considered myself confident or qualified enough to do it, but just to be *picked* to do something like this is quite an honor. To do it is, well, in a nice way—and I don't mean to sound too egotistical here—it's just so nice to feel that you're actually carving out a piece of history. It makes me feel very responsible to do a good job and to do it correctly."

Listening to Gerard Christopher talk about his commitment to the character, you can almost envision him sitting in front of the TV years from now, his grandchildren surrounding him, ready to watch ol' Grandpa in his youth as Superboy, living on in syndication reruns much as George Reeves' Superman endures today. "And somebody will be doing it differently or better than me by then," he assures, "and I'll get a big kick out of that."

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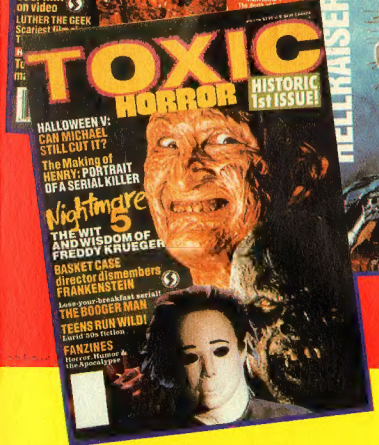

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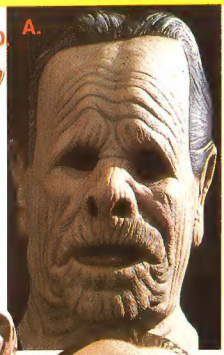

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